

# MY UNDERSTANDING OF *ASUBHA*<sup>1</sup> PRACTICE

A talk given by Ajahn Brahmavamso at Bodhinyana Monastery  
on the 28<sup>th</sup> of March 2001

This evening I want to talk about something that many monks have asked me about especially in Thailand. It is the subject of the body contemplations.

I haven't talked much about body contemplation because in my practice as a monk it didn't seem to be a huge problem. Even going to autopsies and seeing dead bodies was never something that really hit me hard. In fact I was more interested in what was going on, rather than being repulsed by seeing the dead corpses. I do recall in my early life that my father had a black and white television set and there was a program on the television called 'Your Body', which showed operations with the camera above the body. This was forty years ago and I was only a small boy at the time. I would demand to see this program and be so insistent that my parents could not refuse me. Even though there was no red blood to be seen, they would go out of the room for the fifteen minutes that it was on because they couldn't stand watching the body being cut apart. Even my brother went out of the room and left me in front of the television by myself until it was over. Then I'd call them back in again. So maybe my nature was such that things like the body did not really create a problem for me.

Nevertheless we still need to practise the body contemplations that are emphasised in the Forest Tradition, and people want to find out how they fit into the scheme of things. It's important that when we look at any of these practices, especially meditative ones we should know what their purpose is how to do them, and the stages of development. If you don't know the purpose then you may know how to swim, but you won't know where to swim to. We know how to drive the car but we don't know the destination. The whole point of these practices or techniques is that they have a goal, they have a purpose.

**Just a Body!**

So, it's nice to know what that purpose is from your own experience, and also from reading the *suttas*<sup>2</sup>. The purpose of the body contemplations is made very explicit in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. It is to gain an understanding that the body has nothing to do with the 'self'. It is not 'me', not 'mine', it's just a body. That's all there is. As it says in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, by noticing the arising or the ceasing, or both the arising and the ceasing of the body one knows that there is just body that's all. Just know enough to have that wisdom, that insight, that this is not 'me', not 'mine', not a 'self', and so be free of that body. This is actually how the Lord Buddha described body contemplation in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*. The whole purpose of uncovering the attachment that is part of the self-idea or the self-view is a very high goal. I've always considered that's the reason the forest teachers always teach body contemplation in two stages. The first is the stage prior to gaining *samādhi*<sup>3</sup>, and the second is the stage after *samādhi*.

*Samādhi* is so important to the development of the mind towards *Nibbāna*<sup>4</sup> that you have to look at *samādhi* as one of the first stages that we have to attain and develop. This is where many of the forest teachers emphasise body contemplation for those monks, novices, *anagārikas*<sup>5</sup> and lay people who have yet to experience deep *samādhi*. So the first purpose of body contemplation is to clear away the hindrances so that *samādhi* can happen, and then you can get into deep *jhānas*<sup>6</sup>. The second stage of the body contemplation is to use the experience of *jhānas* themselves, or the power conferred on the mind by those experiences to actually see this body so deeply that you can disentangle the attachment to it.

### **Clearing Away the Hindrances**

When we talk about the reason for doing the body contemplations, as a basis for gaining *samādhi*, you should understand the power of this practice, and how it does clear the path for *samādhi* to happen. The first of the hindrances<sup>7</sup> that blocks *samādhi* is *kāma chanda*, concern for the objects of the senses. One of the biggest hindrances is lust, sexual desire for members of the opposite sex, or if you are homosexual desire for people of the same gender. That is desire for the body. We have all experienced this. When lust is present in the mind the body looks beautiful, attractive and desirable. One of the first aims of the body contemplations is to lessen that lust, and

get some reality to the forefront of the mind so that one is not deluded by a mind that only sees part of the story. Body contemplation should lessen lust. If you have seen an autopsy and seen a pretty girl being cut apart, it's an image that you can bring up at any time. When you see a beautiful girl in the newspaper or in front of you in the street, the image that you can bring up at that time is one of a mental autopsy. I know that women sometimes think that when men look at them they are mentally undressing them, but when monks look they should be going much deeper than that. They can even be taking the skin off, and looking inside at their internal organs and everything else that is in there. There's a certain sense, not so much of revulsion as, just 'what's the big deal?' When you take off all the embellishments of a body, and look at skin, it's just skin that's all. Whether it's on the private parts of a female or it's on your own leg, skin is just skin. When you open up the muscles, muscles are just muscles, bones are bones and liver is liver. There is nothing there which is conducive to real lust or to aversion or repulsion. It's just a body, that's all.

See it as just a body; take the opportunity when you have it to go to an autopsy or to a place where you can see dead bodies. See funerals, especially open funerals, where the body is burnt on a pyre and you can actually see the different stages of the burning, the opening up of the body and things dripping out. That actually helps you to have a perspective, which you can bring up at any time for the purpose of lessening lust.

Another contemplation that helps to lessen lust is to see the aging process of a person. If you see a young girl or a young lady, in your imagination allow them to grow old before your eyes. Allow perception to put on wrinkles. Allow the breasts to sag, the body to stoop, the eyes to get wrinkled, and the skin to get leathery, the hair to go grey and start falling out. We see enough old ladies around the place so that is reasonably easy to do. We see the older person within that young person and that takes away all the illusion of beauty.

These are important reflections because not only do they serve the purpose of lessening lust but they help to train the mind before the defilements actually arise. *The time to do such reflections is when lust is not a problem.* The simile that Ajahn Mahā Boowa used was, 'when you are actually in the ring fighting in a boxing tournament, you can't train'. During the fight everything goes so fast that you're just

responding automatically, it's completely conditioned. You actually learn your technique and skill as a boxer not in the ring when you are fighting an opponent, but in the training and sparring sessions. You learn when there's no opponent in front of you. In the same way, if lust is a problem that comes up from time to time, the time to deal with it is when you feel free from lust. Then you have the opportunity and ease of mind to start thinking and reflecting on the body contemplations.

Start to imagine what a person really is, what a woman is, what a man is, what youth is and what old age is. By contemplating that again and again when it's not a problem, you are reconditioning the mind away from the way the world has conditioned you. You've seen so many movies and so much television, boy meets girl, and they live happily ever after or whatever. In the movies and on the TV, all of the pimples are covered over with make up. Everything is done so beautifully, and so wonderfully, it's a fantasy. But we take that fantasy on because we are conditioned by it. We need to recondition the mind. We do that when we feel at ease, when there is space in the mind, and when opponents such as lust or ill will do not confront us. We are preparing ourselves, so the right time to do this degree of body contemplation is not in the midst of an attack of lust, you just can't do it then. You either train and it happens or you haven't trained, and you are lost. So train yourself now. Train yourself when there is space in the mind to really look at these things. It will give you so much more freedom in the world.

If you have an attack of lust, it binds you as if you were in a prison. You're completely obsessed by one idea not even having the chance to sleep peacefully at night. You dream, fantasize, and are hot throughout the whole body. When a person has such attacks of lust for long periods of time it's painful, it's like a fever. It's wonderful to be rid of that and to be in control and at ease, so it's well worth doing this practice. This is conditioning the mind, so don't waste your opportunities. If you have lust that comes up in your monastic life from time to time, realize that there is something you need to do, and when that lust has abated take some time and do the body contemplations.

### **The Body – A Vehicle for the Five Senses**

Body contemplation goes much deeper than just overcoming the worst aspects of lust. The body includes the five senses. The five senses are what the body is all about. If you want to describe what the body is, you might explain it as the thirty-two parts of the body<sup>8</sup>, or the hard parts and the liquid parts, or the four elements<sup>9</sup> that make up this body. When looking for the purpose of this body the insight came to me many years ago that the five senses are here to protect the body. Basically the body provides a vehicle or a playground, for the five senses to mess around in, and explore the world, finding joy and happiness here and there. Without this body the five senses can't play around. I think it's well known that if these five senses are hurt or damaged and can't work, then the body dies. It no longer has a purpose.

So the purpose of this body is to be a vehicle for the five senses to seek pleasure in the world. A person takes a new body after death because they want another vehicle to search out the pleasures of the world. A car is there to go to the pub, the movies, and to go here and there. The only purpose of the car is to seek pleasure in the world. The only purpose of the body is to give these five senses a vehicle, the means to go out and find pleasure. Seeing this close and intricate connection between the body and the five senses, you realize that this body is the five senses, and the five senses are the body.

There is very little in your body that isn't sensitive to touch, heat, cold, noise, smells, tastes and sounds. It's not only the ear that is sensitive to sound; you can feel some of the sound vibrations in the body. The eyes are sensitive to light. This whole body is a sensitive mechanism. When we contemplate the body in this respect, we realize that in order to get into *jhānas* we have to overcome the five senses and allow them to cease. It's very much a 'letting go' of this body. You need to contemplate this when you're getting into deep meditation if you're having difficulty getting that little bit further. It's because sounds, aches in the body, heat, or an itch in your throat is disturbing you. I've often contemplated, 'Why am I disturbed by these things?' When I'm meditating, and I hear the sounds of the cicadas outside, the sound of cars, or someone speaking, I think, "Why am I hearing this? It has nothing to do with me. I'm not interested, it's not important, why can't I just stop listening to this?"

The reason I couldn't stop listening to that noise outside and I couldn't stop attending to the aches, pains and cold in the body, was because deep down I'd been programmed – or if you like conditioned – to pay attention to the sounds and feelings in the body for security, safety, and the preservation of this body of mine. I'm sure that any psychologist would understand that the senses of hearing, feeling, and sight are really your protective mechanisms or alarm systems. If there is an animal walking through the bush or the jungle you hear it, that's a common experience. We were talking about that the other night at teatime. It's often happened to me in the jungle, sitting under a mosquito net and hearing a sound that seems to be a huge animal. You're not imagining it. It sounds like a huge animal. When it gets closer you feel a bit scared so you shout and flash your light, and then you see it's just a little mouse. During the day the mouse sounds like a mouse but in the night it can sound like an elephant. The mind is over compensating just to make sure in case there is danger. I'm not sure but maybe it's because of genetically inbred conditioning.

We've all lived in jungles in previous lives, and they're dangerous places. People do get trampled on, bitten by snakes, and they do die, so we've got this very sensitive warning mechanism. We have to listen to any sounds straight away. It seems to be beyond our control. It's a deep conditioning inside all of us, based on the body. Thinking that this body is important, that this body is mine, and I have to look after it. I can't leave the sense of sound turned off because if I'm not listening and if I'm not feeling the body anything could happen. Ants could crawl on me, a snake may bite me or something else could creep up onto me. In the same way when a person has valuables in their house if they are very concerned about them, all their senses are out there guarding those valuables. Our senses guard what we think is valuable, such as this body of ours. That's attachment to the body. We can let go of that attachment to the body by realizing that this body is just a mess of flesh and bones, skin, and so on. It's not really valuable and it's not really important. You've had many bodies over the eons of *saṃsāra*<sup>10</sup>. This particular body that you have now is not special. So strong practitioners are willing to sacrifice the body for the *Dhamma*<sup>11</sup>, they are willing to die for the *Dhamma*. In other words they are not concerned about this body. It's better to have the tiger eat you while you are staying in the forest, rather

than not seek seclusion at all. In other words you can just sit there and not be concerned. You let go of the body.

To gain that degree of renunciation by letting go of the body is quite difficult to do. This is not something that lies on the intellectual plain of thoughts and ideas. It's something that lies at the deepest level of your conditioning. If you find that you get to a level of meditation but you can't go deeper because you can't really let go of sounds and the feelings in the body, it means that there is an attachment to the body. You think this body is valuable and you are afraid to let it go. You are afraid to leave it alone because you think something might happen to it. Obviously faith<sup>12</sup> helps enormously here. Have faith in the teachers and just let go. It's fine, nothing will happen to you.

It's important to have that faith, but it's also important to have the wisdom to know that it's okay to be able to leave the body. The body is not important at all. Many people, having just died have had 'out of the body' experiences, and they have seen their bodies on the operating table, in a motorbike accident, or whatever. One of the children I taught when I was a school teacher said he was in a motorbike accident once. It scared the life out of him, not quite but almost. He was floating about seeing his mangled body below. Fortunately he came back and recovered, he said it was an incident that would stay with him for the rest of his life. Realizing the body is just a body, it's not such a big deal any more. However you contemplate the body, whether it's the thirty two parts, seeing dead bodies, seeing autopsies, or just taking it apart as the four elements, you see there is nothing beautiful there, it's just a body that's all. Seeing it decay, seeing other animals decay, seeing the similarity in all bodies, whether human or animal, you see there is nothing valuable here. It's a body that's all. It's just one body among many bodies.

### **Letting Go of the Body to Enter *Jhānas***

Once you see that, and reflect on it – if your reflection is really deep – it should make it easy to let go of the body. There should be no problem to be sitting here watching the present moment, the silence, and the breath. Even when you are watching the breath you are not disturbed by noises or by aches and pains in the body, you are watching the breath because you're confident enough to let go of the body. You don't

care about your legs, your bum, your back or anywhere else. Just leave it alone. It's not mine, it's somebody else's problem. If you have that degree of detachment doing body contemplation, the body is easy to let go of. It means the senses can shut down, they've got no work to do. Then the door opens and you can get into the *jhānas*. The body is one of the biggest hindrances to entering a *jhāna*.

The 'doer' that I keep talking about is also the 'controller', or the so-called security guard who tries to make sure everything is okay. It's the security guard that never really fulfils its purpose because it's supposed to make sure everything is okay but it creates more problems than it solves. It never makes you feel okay, but just keeps you working. So it's nice to be able to shut down the security guard or the doer, by understanding that there's nothing to guard any way. So my understanding of the more refined stage of body contemplation is having enough renunciation and dispassion towards this body, to allow the five senses to cease in order to get into a *jhāna*, because the *jhānas* are the world of the mind, they're 'mind only' states.

When a *nimitta*<sup>13</sup> comes up, that's the first stage of going into a *jhāna*. When the five senses stop the sixth sense, the mind becomes manifest. Having seen that process of letting go and knowing that road into deep *samādhi*, you can see that this is what's happening. The six senses are going and with them the body. There is no body consciousness in *jhānas*.

Some of the *suttas* use similes for the four *jhānas* (for example MN 39.15). They refer to pervading the whole body with *pītisukha*<sup>14</sup>. 'Just like a skilled bath attendant pervades the bath-powder with water so that there is no part of that bath-powder which isn't permeated by the water. In the same way there is no part of the body that is not permeated by *pītisukha*'. When I was a young monk I was quite confused about that because through the experience of deep *samādhi* there was no sense of a body. Even in some medium *samādhi*'s, almost there, but not quite into a *jhāna* yet – just fully aware of the breath – there was no sense of a body. Fully aware of the breath means you are not aware of any other part of your body. You're not aware of your feet, knees, bottom, or your hands, you're just aware of breath. Sometimes it was fun when the hands disappeared, "Oh! Where are my fingers?" When I wasn't paying



attention to them they would just disappear. If you pay attention to them there they are again.

The word *kāya* (body) in Pāli does not necessarily mean the physical body, it means any group of things, in the same way as the English word body means anything from a physical body to a body of soldiers, a corporate body, or a body of evidence. The four elements are not in a body of evidence, there's no solid substance, but we still call it a body of evidence. It's just a group of facts supporting a particular case. The word is used in the same way in Pāli. When you do the third training in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, the *sabba kāya paṭisaṇvedhī*, you breathe in, and you breathe out, that's how you train yourself. *Sabba kāya paṭisaṇvedhī* literally means all *kāya*, he feels the breath as he breathes in and out, that's how he trains himself. It does not mean that as you breathe, you have to make sure that you know your five left toes, and your five right toes or know your left and right ear or where everything else is in your body. What it means is the whole body of the breath, the whole breath body. It means from the very beginning of an in breath, to the end of the out breath, with spaces in between, from the very beginning of the out breath, to the end of the in breath – the whole of the breath. All the meditation teachers, the commentaries, and every manual that I've ever read on meditation, agree on that at least, and that's a good indication of what *kāya* means. It's also the *sakkāya-ditthi* of the hindrances – the defilements – the fetter that stops you from being a stream winner. It doesn't mean some view of the physical body or this whole group of *khandhas*<sup>15</sup>, that makes up the mind and body. Even *nāma kāya*, and *rūpa kāya* only mean a group of mental elements, and a group of physical elements. So don't get deceived by that Pāli word *kāya*. If you read the *suttas* in Pāli you get to know these terms through familiarity and you start to understand their meanings. So in the *suttas* when it talks about pervading the whole of this body, it means the whole of the body of that experience. The *pītisukha* of *jhāna* is there continuously and fully, there is no perception at that time which is separate from the *pītisukha*. There is no person outside watching that *pītisukha*. There is no gap in the *pītisukha*. In the same way when watching the whole body of the breath, there is no gap of attention, the mind is with the breath continuously, one moment after another with out interruption. That's what it means in that simile, just pure *pītisukha*. There is no part of the experience which is apart

from *pīṭisukha*. It's one pointed. One pointed means just one perception continuously, over a long period of time.

So understanding that, you understand the whole idea of *samādhi* in *jhānas* is just letting go of the physical body. You have to develop some body contemplations so that you are not attached to this body any more. It is even said that we should do lots of body contemplations so that at the time of death we can let go of this body easily. We have to let go of it anyway so we might as well leave it voluntarily, instead of clinging onto it to the very end. I remember a case – the person was not a Buddhist but more like a Christian-Buddhist-New Age person who was having counselling, and she struggled to the very end to breathe and to live. She didn't want to die despite all of my advice and counselling. That was a terrible way to go. It's much better just to let go. Sometimes we say we do the body or death contemplation, so that when it is our time to lay down these five *khandhas* we can do so with a bit of dignity, and grace. At the very least we won't upset other people who are looking on and we will have a much better time ourselves. The act of death or the moment of the death is so similar to the process of *samādhi*, it's just leaving the body alone, and letting go. That attachment or association with the body and saying 'it's mine', 'it's me', 'it's my body', is what makes it hard at the end.

People who die temporarily sometimes remember what happened to them after death. They usually have similar experiences of floating outside the body. Once they start to lose consciousness and perception of the body, they go off towards a light and the mind starts to approach it. It's called a *nimitta*. This *nimitta* occurs when the mind starts to manifest itself. It's the same process that occurs in a *jhāna*, going into and through that *nimitta*. People who almost die sometimes have these out of the body experiences. They go through and then they bounce out again because they still have some strong states of mind, images, and complex *nimittas*. Understanding *jhānas* you understand the nature of the body and the mind and also what's going on there.

The first stage, the first purpose of *kāyagatasati*, or body contemplation is to get rid of lust, and then to get rid of all the other concerns with the body by seeing the body for what it is, so that you can really detach from it. Your ability to get *nimittas* and

*jhānas* depends on being able to detach from this body temporarily. If you haven't got a *nimitta* yet in your meditation, very likely it's because there is still some association with the body. You are thinking 'this is my body'.

Body contemplation can do wonders, and of course, after one has attained a *jhāna*, the mind is empowered, and if you wish to do body contemplation, you can really take this body and other people's bodies apart easily. That is because after a *jhāna* the mind is just like a well trained servant, one of those English butlers who never answer back. You tell him to go and get you a cup of tea, and he brings you a cup of tea exactly as you requested. He never make mistakes. A mind that has emerged from a *jhāna* is like the very best of servants, you just tell it what to do and it does it to the fullest of your expectations. If you ask it to contemplate the body, you can go right into it, and contemplate it with ease. That's when you understand the words used by the Buddha, that the deeper you go into the *jhāna* the more workable, malleable and soft the mind is. So this is the second time you should do the body contemplation. You can really look upon this body and its five senses, take it apart and realize exactly what it is.

Another type of body contemplation is to do reflections on your passed lives, which gives the perspective not just of the body from birth to old age but also the next body, and the body after that. To be able to see, in this whole perspective one body after another. If you could only see how many bodies you have lived in then of course, this one is not important any more. It's just another one, here we go again. It's not special, it's not important, it's not valuable. Only rare things become valuable but when they are as common as dirt and anyone can pick them up at any time, then they have no value any more. Because this is the only body we know, or we think we know, we think it is actually important to us. It's so valuable, and so essential we even think it's sacred.

Occasionally after a deep meditation it's nice to recollect past lives. Sometimes you see whole spans of life. That life when you were a beautiful woman, and then an old hag that no one wants. It gives you an idea about the beauty in the body and what happens to it afterwards. At the moment most of us are just at the beginning part of

our lives, there are only a few of us who are starting to get old, and starting to fall apart, but all of us should be able to imagine that. The imagination and the reality are sometimes far apart but with passed life memories you can actually know, know what it's like to get old and really sick and then to get very old and die. That gives you a perspective on the body.

If you're focussing deeply on the body you will find that the *nimittas* come up very easily. You can actually form a *nimitta* of your body and give yourself an autopsy, take out the parts from your own body, dissect it, look at it, and see everything. The whole idea is to see it as nothing important, just a body that's all. It arises, it passes away, it comes and goes, no big deal, which means that you can let it go, and by letting go of the body you should be letting go of all concern with the five senses.

The pleasures in the world are the pleasures in the body, the sexual orgasm in the body or beautiful sights, are felt here in your heart. Joy and laughter are felt here in the guts. It's all in the body. The aches and pains, the hatred and disappointments, you feel them inside with the body. All this pleasure and pain – for most people that is all there is, that's why it's call *āmissa sukha*, *āmissa dukkha*, happiness and suffering of the world. If we can let go of that after a *jhāna*, we are actually getting rid of the attachment to the body and the five senses as being 'me' and 'mine', and all the feelings, all the *saṅkhāra*<sup>16</sup>, which is associated with that. We get rid of a heap of defilements and *kilesas*. But that's really not enough to go the whole hog; because the problem with *kāyagatasati* is that just by itself it doesn't touch the stronghold of the illusion of 'self', the 'doer' and the 'knower'. They are associated with the *citta*, the mind and somehow, sooner or later we have to see that which knows – the mind, consciousness, and that which does the volitional activity, the *cetanā* – we have to see them in their arising and falling. They're just mind, that's all, see it just arising and falling, there is nothing there.

It's only when you complete that one, that you see all the five *khandhas*, whether the *rūpa khandha*, this physical body, or the *vedanās*, the feelings, associated with the five senses, the body and mind, including the pure mind states in the *jhānas*. You see all those as *vedanā* that's all, happiness and bliss, and then no bliss. The happiness of

first *jhāna* is really weird. Compared to the happiness of the second *jhāna* the happiness of the first *jhāna* is suffering. It is bliss, but it's not good enough. This happiness and suffering business is all relative. Even the happiness of the mind is just relative; there is always another one, until there is nothing at all, which is the highest happiness. *Nirodha-samāpatti*, the end of all perception and feelings. *Nibbāna* here and now. To actually see the 'doer' and the 'knower' in the mind as just arising and falling, as insubstantial, instead of entities which exist by themselves.

### **A Big Hole in the Middle**

To know, you have to know something. To do, you have to do something. When one actually perceives 'doing' and 'knowing' only then can one understand the whole five *khandhas*, not just the body and the *vedanā saṅkhāra*, (the body consciousness, sight, sound, smell, taste, and physical touch consciousness), but all of the mind consciousness as well. See those as empty, completely *suññatā*, arising and falling, just going their own way. If you can actually see that, you see that there is no place in the world where you can have a 'self', a 'soul', a 'me' or a 'mine'. There is no owner, no being, no person, no self, no essence; you just see that emptiness goes all the way through. There is not a nice little dot somewhere at the centre where 'you' are. Even if you go into that you find it is just a big hole in the middle, and that's the realization of full emptiness, full *anattā*, non-self, the whole five *khandhas* are not a 'self', not 'me', not 'mine', and of course, that's Stream Winning. After you become a Stream Winner<sup>17</sup> it's great to do *kāyagatasati*, because for the stream winner to get to know this, you have still to stop the old conditioning of the body. Seeing it you know it, but the new knowledge is still competing with the old knowledge as is the new conditioning with the old conditioning. By developing the *kāyagatasati* again and again, seeing that this body is not a 'me', not beautiful, not ugly, nothing to really worry or be concerned about, the Stream Winner, the learner, the *Ariya*, starts to abandon concern about the body more and more.

I chose my words carefully, 'abandon concern about the body', so much of our time is taken up with bodily things, making it comfortable, feeding it, washing it and dressing it. It's amazing how much time we spend scratching it, moving it this way and that way, getting comfortable, exercising, resting it and taking it to the toilet. For some

people it takes fifty or sixty percent of the day. They have no time for anything else but looking after the body. So by letting go of this body the Stream Winner gives more time to letting go of world and going into the realm of the mind. You are actually leaving this world not as an idea but as a practice, while spending more time in the realm of the mind. Why? Because you are basically they not interested in this world or this body. That's why some of the great monks go off into the jungles and stay by themselves. What are they doing there? They are doing *jhānas* mostly, letting go of the whole body, not being concerned if they get eaten by a tiger or not. They are just dwelling in the realm of the mind, spending as much time as possible living life as simply as possible. So little time is required to look after this body, one meal a day, there's no need to sweep too much or build big palaces for the body because it's easy to maintain, a simple hut is good enough,. You don't have to spend all your time doing things. You can spend all your time just sitting in the mind, away from the world. Doing that is a reconditioning of the mind.

An *Anāgāmi*<sup>18</sup> lives in those ways, and is completely disinterested in the body and the five senses. *Rūparāga vyāpāda*, the fetters are abandoned by the *Anāgāmi*. he *rūparāga*, the world of the body is completely abandoned. An *Anāgāmi* is not really concerned about that at all, the last five fetters all merge into one, just leaving the attachment to the mind. Of course, the *Anāgāmi* already knows that the mind is not a 'self', that there is no 'doer', no 'knower' in there, but the conditioning is still there. As they say, the thoughts of 'I am this person, who is thinking', 'I am this person, who knows' sometimes slip in because of past habits. But the *Arahant* is fully reconditioned and that's why the *Arahant* has perfect mindfulness. Perfect mindfulness means they know fully all the time that whatever they hear, see, smell, taste, touch or cognise, the thing doing the cognising isn't 'me', 'mine' or a 'self'. The object being cognised isn't 'me', 'mine' or a 'self'. The process is not 'me', not 'mine', not a 'self'. There is nobody in here at all, so there is no entity perceived, thought of, or conceived, in any of those terms at any time. That's what an *Arahant* is, that's what you call perfect mindfulness or perfect seeing in terms of *anattā*, non-self.

This is how the practices of contemplation of the body are relevant to the whole path according to my understanding and knowledge of the *suttas*. They are practices very well worth doing. So please don't neglect them, they are important. I often contemplate, 'how can more people in this monastery gain deep *samādhi*?' and perhaps body contemplation is one of the things we could pay more attention to. Again I must emphasise to do the practices not when lust is in front of you, but when lust isn't there. Really reflect on this body, look at skulls, and look at pictures of bodies being opened up. Find opportunities to do the practice. If you go overseas, go to see autopsies, and see dead bodies being carved up. Go to funerals, feel the bodies so that you get the image deeply into your consciousness. Bring it to mind later and transfer that image onto yourself, *just as they are, soon I will be*. That will lessen lust and the entanglement with the physical body. It will make meditation easier, make the *jhānas* more available, and after coming out of the *jhāna* you will really be able to cut this attachment, this feeling that the body is something to do with you. You will even be able to recall past lives and see the range of bodies you have had, and that will give you a great perspective for letting them go. Then after you gain Stream Entry, just carry on with body contemplation so that the *jhānas* become even more powerful, more frequent and deeper, so that you can let go of this concern for the five *khandhas* completely as an *Arahant*.

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<sup>1</sup> *Asubha*: Not-beautiful (sometimes translated as repulsiveness, or loathsomeness). The perception of impurity, loathsomeness, and foulness. The contemplation of the 32 parts of the body.

<sup>2</sup> *Sutta*: Discourse of the Lord Buddha, or one of his chief disciples, as recorded in the Pāli Canon.

<sup>3</sup> *Samādhi*: Sustained attention on one thing.

<sup>4</sup> *Nibbāna*: Literally; "Extinction" (as in the going out of a flame). The supreme goal for Buddhists – it is the destruction of greed, hatred, and delusion – thus, the end of all suffering.

<sup>5</sup> *Anagārika*: Literally: "Homeless One". In Western Theravāda Monasteries this is taken to mean someone who keeps the eight precepts and is in training to ordain as a novice monk.

<sup>6</sup> *Jhāna*: The deep meditation states of letting go.

<sup>7</sup> Hindrances, The Five:

1. Sensual desire
2. Ill-will and anger
3. Lethargy and dullness

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4. Restless and Remorse
  5. Doubt

<sup>8</sup> Body, the 32 parts: Hair of the head, hair of the body, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone marrow, brain, kidney, heart, liver, chest membrane, spleen, lungs, bowels, stomach, stomach contents, faeces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, lubricating fluid, urine.

<sup>9</sup> Elements, The Four:

1. Earth – the element of extension or solidity.
2. Water – the element of liquidity or cohesion.
3. Fire – the element of kinetic energy, heat and cold.
4. Wind – the element of motion or support.

<sup>10</sup> *Samsāra*: The round of rebirth (Literally: ‘wandering on’).

<sup>11</sup> *Dhamma*: The teachings of the Buddha; the truth; the Norm.

<sup>12</sup> *Saddhā*: Confidence or faith.

<sup>13</sup> *Nimitta*: A sign, characteristic. In the context of Buddhist meditation, a mental sign.

<sup>14</sup> *Pītisukha*: Joy and happiness born of letting go. Factors of the first two *jhānas*.

<sup>15</sup> *Khandhas* - Aggregates. The 5 groups into which the Buddha has summed up all the physical and mental phenomena of existence (modified from “Buddhist Dictionary”).

1. body, *rūpa*;
2. feeling, *vedanā*;
3. perception, *saññā*;
4. mental formations, *saṅkhāras*;
5. and consciousness, *viññāṇa*.

<sup>16</sup> *Saṅkhāra*: Usually means volitional formations. Sometimes used to refer to that which is conditioned, or arises dependent on causes.

<sup>17</sup> *Sotāpanna*: Stream Winner, the first stage of Enlightenment. One guaranteed to attain Full Enlightenment within seven lifetimes at most.

<sup>18</sup> *Anāgāmī*: Non Returner, one who has attained the third stage of Enlightenment